

Speaking Jewish: “Yiddish” in the Discourse of First-Generation American Yiddish Speakers

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ABSTRACT

By the end of this century, well over half of the world’s languages will disappear. Analyzing how minority languages are discussed by native speakers can provide insight into the relationship between language ideologies and language survival. This paper addresses the position of Yiddish in America by examining discourse about the language by first-generation American native speakers and by demonstrating how these speakers construct an ideological version of Yiddish through their speech. How this specific version of Yiddish may have affected its current position is discussed. The paper also considers Critical Discourse Analysis as a useful method in analyzing discourse regarding Yiddish while critiquing its prizing of dominant discourse as the subject of analysis.

INTRODUCTION

This study presents the analysis of conversations between the researcher, a third-generation American who studies Yiddish as a second language, and several first-generation American native Yiddish speakers. The aim of the study is to describe the way in which the native Yiddish speakers construct an ideologically laden Yiddish language through their linguistic choices and to discuss the importance of this shared, constructed Yiddish. In addition, this study aims to provide a model of how analyzing nondominant speech can lead to insights into socially constructed knowledge.

Despite Yiddish’s vibrant and deep history in American life, it is currently considered a language that might not survive the next century outside of Hassidic enclaves. By evaluating how Yiddish is constructed through the discourse of first-generation American Yiddish speakers, this study will shed light on Yiddish’s contested cultural meaning and how the discourse surrounding the language has affected its current position. This study focuses on the speech of first-generation American Jews because their generation may be the last cohort of secular native Yiddish speakers and their generation’s views, in part, shaped those of their children’s generation, which largely did not continue speaking the language. By focusing on first-generation Americans, the study departs from the trend in Yiddish studies as recognized in Shandler (2003) to analyze the language’s cultural role through a historical or literary look at the intellectual and artistic Yiddish circles in immigrant America.

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How languages are given cultural meaning and character through speech is an example of a topic that can be fruitfully analyzed through a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) lens. The CDA method aims to uncover how linguistic choices construct ideological meanings. Yet, a survey of CDA texts illustrates that CDA analysts tend to prize the study of dominant discourse and ignore how minority discourse, such as the discourse of Jewish women, also spreads ideological versions of reality. This study, in part, argues that the CDA methodology can be fruitfully applied to nondominant discourse.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Critical Discourse Analysis

Norman Fairclough, a prominent proponent of what is now referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis, summarizes his view of the relationship between discourse and society, saying that discourse “*constitutes* the social” (1992, p. 8). He proposes that language in use is the material through which social knowledge, social relationships, and social identities are constructed. This proposition is based on the idea that identity and social structures are constantly being negotiated and created through speech, as opposed to being “fixed” or “real.” Fairclough (1992) also asserts that the linguistic choices one makes when constituting the social are shaped by power relations; dominant versions of reality come to be seen as normal, as opposed to stemming from a specific ideological stance. Fairclough defines CDA as a method that attempts to become “conscious” (p. 9) of the ideological implications in discourse through linguistic, thematic, and contextual analyses, thus exposing the relationships between discourse, reality, and power.

CDA analysts’ interest in how power shapes discourse has affected their choices of whose discourse to analyze. This is evident in van Dijk’s (1999) study, which implies that the conveyance of dominant ideologies is of primary interest to CDA analysts. Van Dijk, like Fairclough, believes that conversations “are a major conduit of social ‘information-processing,’ and provide the context for the expression and persuasive conveyance of shared knowledge and beliefs” (p. 543). Yet, by “shared knowledge and beliefs,” van Dijk means the beliefs and knowledge of those who hold power. This is evident in his model for how biased beliefs spread: “white people ... informally reproduce—and occasionally challenge—the dominant consensus on ethnic affairs through informal everyday talk” (p. 543). Van Dijk’s essay does provide convincing descriptions of the linguistic patterns that normalize racist attitudes. However, because van Dijk believes that white discourse spreads ideological versions on reality, he ignores minority discourse, as do most of the essays presented in CDA anthologies. While it is clear that critiques of dominant discourse are enlightening and important for social change, the act of choosing dominant discourse as the focus of academic study prizes its power. If in fact conversations “are a major conduit” for sharing and spreading beliefs, then we must consider minority discourse as a potent force in constituting reality in minority communities. To ignore the agency of the discourse of minority groups is to reaffirm the very power structures CDA analysts critique.

Kress (1996) also diagnoses the methodological problem of focusing only on dominant discourse. He recommends that CDA practitioners work to collect descriptions of how all of the groups within a society use language through a CDA lens. By compiling knowledge of all of the

linguistic resources available to represent reality, the more likely we are to value and utilize nondominant ways of speaking. Kress's methodological critique locates what is problematic in essays like van Dijk's (1999), which would have been more complete had van Dijk analyzed the way in which racist speech is or is not reproduced when ethnic minorities talk about themselves. Van Leeuwen's (1996) study is another that would have benefited from incorporating Kress's methodological critique. Van Leeuwen announces his aim to compile all the linguistic resources available to represent social actors as individuals or as part of groups. Yet, he looks only at what he recognizes as the dominant discourse, and in doing so fails to describe the comprehensive set of linguistic data he set out to amass.

In this study, I analyze speech using many of the CDA principles established by Fairclough and others. Because, as has been stated, the cultural meaning of a language is itself constructed through speech, it is a suitable subject for a method that works to uncover the ideological implications of shared linguistic choices and patterns in discourse. As Jewish women, my participants' discourse has rarely, if ever, been considered the dominant discourse in America. Yet, I will illustrate that the ideology naturalized through their speech still has important implications for those who study the survival of Yiddish.

Intertextual Analysis

Fairclough (1999) posits that intertextual analysis is essential to the CDA method. He defines intertextuality as the practice of bringing the language or linguistic features of outside genres or "discourses, narratives, registers" (p. 184) into a text. According to Fairclough, intertextual analysis creates an important window into the social context of the speaker and the different ways of speaking available to him or her. While a "semantically homogeneous" (p. 206) text might express more conventional social relations, such social relations can be challenged and reinterpreted by bringing in other forms of discourse. Thus, by paying close attention to the genres of speech drawn into a particular discourse, we can uncover layers of meaning within the discourse. Fairclough does not reflect on how speakers also map meaning onto quoted texts when they are brought into discourse. For instance, when a speaker quotes a Yiddish conversation from the past in a contemporary English context, how this quoting affects the meaning of the English speech is of interest to CDA analysts. However, one might also consider how the context in which the speech is quoted shapes the meaning of the quoted text itself. This relationship, in which the quoted text maps meaning onto the context and the context maps meaning onto the quoted text, mirrors other associations valued by CDA analysts, such as the impact of society on speech and speech on society. In the section of this paper entitled "The Context of Yiddish," I explore how intertextual analysis that focuses on the status of the quoted text leads to insights about the social construction of reality through discourse.

Research Questions

1. How do the participants' linguistic choices construct an ideological view of Yiddish?
2. What is this ideological view?

METHOD

Participants

The Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale is a predominantly Jewish long-term health care facility in the Riverdale area of the Bronx. I am a staff member at the Home and am in regular contact with the residents. With the assistance of therapists on staff, I compiled a list of the American-born Yiddish speakers living in several units throughout the Home. Over the course of two months, I formally collected data from six residents: Alma, Esther, Fay, Frances, Sarah, and Tillie. I met with each participant individually and met with Frances on more than one occasion. (In addition to these formally taped conversations, I held many informal conversations with residents on the subject of Yiddish, to which I will occasionally refer.)

Materials and Data Collection Procedures

To initiate our conversations, I approached potential participants and asked whether or not they did indeed speak Yiddish. If so, I told them that I would like to tape record their thoughts on the language and asked if I could set up an appointment with them. During the sessions, I attempted to elicit the participants' thoughts on Yiddish in an informal way by focusing on their personal histories. I did not follow a predetermined list of questions, but attempted to allow the participants to guide the direction of the talk. Overall, the conversations were friendly, warm, and, at points, quite personal.

Data Analysis Procedures

I transcribed all of the conversations within a week of their taking place. I began my analysis with Frances' transcript because I had met with her several times for several hours and had acquired a wealth of data on the subject of Yiddish. I located the sections of the conversations in which Yiddish was the topic and then performed a grammatical, phonological, contextual, and lexical analysis of those sections. I marked recurrences of linguistic patterns and analyzed the ideological implications of these patterns. I then performed a similar analysis of the other transcripts. I was especially attuned to evidence of other participants expressing ideologies similar to those expressed by Frances using the same or different linguistic means, and to their expressing different ideologies, thus leading me to question whether aspects of Frances's discourse were specific to her and not shared by other speakers of her generation.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Yiddish or Jewish

A lexical analysis of how participants name Yiddish is an illuminating place to begin looking at how they linguistically construct a specific Yiddish. In Yiddish, the word *Yiddish* is both the name of the language and an adjective meaning *Jewish*. Throughout the discussions, Frances and Tillie call the language "Jewish" and Alma calls it both "Yiddish" and "Jewish."

(Several residents of the Hebrew Home have also called the language “Jewish” in casual conversation.) In addition, Sarah often uses the term “Yiddish” as an adjective to describe nouns separate from the language. In contrast to Frances, Tillie, and Alma, I call the language “Yiddish” throughout all of the discussions. The lexical choice of “Jewish” to name the language and the use of the word “Yiddish” as an adjective presents an idea of Yiddish as a language through which Jewishness is expressed.

Frances first names the language under discussion “Jewish” in turn 18 (see Appendix D) where she says, “In fact the man I married HA (2.9) he spoke NO Jewish at a:ll.” The dissonance between the fact that her husband was Jewish and yet did not “speak Jewish” is highlighted by the way in which Frances places stress on and extends “a:ll” and the humor she finds in her own statement as reflected in her laughter. In turn 20, she goes on to say that when her husband was trying to impress her stepmother, he would speak “BROken Jewish.” She raises her volume on “BROken” which again emphasizes his lack of Yiddish ability. Although Frances and many Yiddish speakers of her generation might see “Jewish” merely as the name of the language, the ideological implications of this normalized choice still carries importance. The dual meaning of the word in English implies that when one speaks “Jewish,” one is also expressing Jewishness or communicating a Jewish identity. Yet, in context, the name as used by Frances also encapsulates the irony that one can be Jewish and be distanced enough from Jewishness to not speak “Jewish.”

That “Jewish” the noun also implies “Jewish” the adjective is especially transparent when “Jewish” is used in the adjectival position, as it often is. In turn 74, Frances states the following about her friend:

- 74 F: ... if we had any affair to go to a money raiser some of these organizations and it had JEwish entertainers we'd HOWL with laughter and she'd say (1.1) what was that. Vera (.8) you've heard enough to understand some English-some Jewish.

When Frances first says that she went to hear “JEwish entertainers,” it is grammatically unclear whether she means the entertainers were Jewish or performed in “Jewish.” This grammatical duality enacts the dual meaning of the name. One must interpret what Frances means by “Jewish” and, in doing so, engage in the cultural practice of determining what makes something Jewish and what makes something Yiddish. It is only when Frances’s friend Vera does not understand the entertainers, because they are literally speaking in another language, is it clear that “Jewish” refers to Yiddish. The semantic potential of the word “Jewish” lexically constructs a Yiddish that is difficult to distinguish from Jewishness itself.

Similar to Frances, Tillie also names the language “Jewish,” and does so in a way that suggests that to speak Yiddish is to evoke Jewishness. In turn 8 (see Appendix F), Tillie responds to my question of whether she spoke Yiddish in her mother’s home saying, “No. My mother sp-well my mother spoke a good Jewish.” The phrase “a good Jewish” suggests that there are cultural aspects native to the language. When one speaks “a good Italian” for example, it is implied that one speaks the variety of the language that encapsulates its character by using expressions and phonological features that are considered true to the spirit of the language. Speaking “a good Italian” or “a good Jewish” is different from speaking a correct Italian or Jewish. That Tillie’s mother spoke “a good Jewish,” as opposed to her having spoken Yiddish

well, implies that her “Jewish” was very Jewish. (The phrase can even be seen as echoing the expression, “a good Jew.”) It is the name of the language, *Jewish*, that ties the act of speaking “a good” variety of Yiddish to expressing Jewishness itself. Thus, Tillie’s lexical choice, as does Frances’s, constructs a link between the language and an expression of Jewishness.

As Tillie and Frances make evident, one way in which to translate the word “Yiddish” into English discourse is by using “Jewish” as a noun that names the language and as an adjective. However, Sarah uses the word “Yiddish” in English as she might in Yiddish, to name the language and to refer to things Jewish, or Jewishness (see Appendix E). This use of the word also obscures the border between Yiddish the language and Yiddish the cultural and religious identity, constructing a Yiddish language that is indistinguishable from Eastern European Jewishness. When I ask Sarah what we would lose if Yiddish were no longer a living language, she responds as follows:

26 S: I THINK what would be- we would the hu- we would lose the HEART of Ashkenazi Yiddish. We would lose the EuroPEAN Yiddish. We would perhaps go back to the Spanish (.) Hebrew...

One might interpret Sarah’s response as quite circular: if we lost Yiddish, we would lose Yiddish. However, Sarah, a self-declared writer, who is elsewhere very careful about the words she chooses, may also be using the word to mean Jewish. She would thus be suggesting that to lose Yiddish would be to lose what is central to Ashkenazi Jewish culture, and perhaps the entire Ashkenazi influence on Jewish culture. In attempting to determine whether Sarah indeed means “Yiddish” the language or “Yiddish” Ashkenazi Jewishness one must go through the process of trying to separate the strands of language and culture. Thus, one must engage in viewing these two aspects of Jewish life as interwoven. Just as Frances and Tillie’s use of the word “Jewish” constructs a language linked to communicating Jewish identity, Sarah’s use of the word “Yiddish” constructs a Yiddish that is interchangeable with and intrinsically tied to Jewishness.

My responses to Frances’s and Tillie’s use of the word “Jewish” highlight the fact that their lexical pattern is ideologically laden. Although I initiate the general topic of Yiddish in all of the conversations, my role of interviewer is almost immediately shifted to the role of interested listener who has come to hear an expert with a rich history. In almost all of my turns while speaking with Frances and Tillie, I produce supportive backchannelling, one-word responses to the participants’ reminiscences, or questions that build off of what was previously said. Yet, despite the fact that almost all of my turns work to support the participants, I do not incorporate their name for Yiddish into my own speech, as is illustrated in turns 35, 89, 106, 116, and 147 in my conversation with Frances and turn 13 of my conversation with Tillie. Nor do I approach new participants using the term “Jewish,” which may have influenced their subsequent lexical choice. Even when I summarize what Frances and I have been discussing in turn 157, I say, “We we::re talking about if Yiddish was gonna die out,” when we had in fact been talking about whether “Jewish” was going to die out. Similarly, after Tillie discusses how she spoke “Jewish” more often when her father was living with her, I ask her, in turn 13, if she misses speaking “Yiddish.”

My unwillingness to adopt the word *Jewish* as the name of the language suggests my unwillingness to talk about Yiddish as a vehicle for Jewishness. My own socially constructed view of the language stems from a different understanding of what aspects of identity must be

performed through speech. To be able to “talk Jewish” implies that Jewishness is something fixed and recognizable, as opposed to a slippery, ever-changing aspect of identity that one can choose to present or to keep private. However, my resistance to the notion that one’s ethnicity can be fixed and easily discerned stems out of a contemporary idea of identity itself as unlocatable and, in part, created through language rather than merely communicated by it. Furthermore, due to my contemporary view of language and culture, I connote identifying people by their ethnic identities with stereotyping and bias. Saying that someone is “talking Jewish” could imply that all one sees about the speaker is his or her Jewishness. However, for those of the participants’ generation, someone’s “talking Jewish” could imply that the speaker is a member of their community. To suggest that Yiddish is a marker of this unified understanding of Jewishness, is also to suggest that there is one Yiddish mode of expression, independent of the content of the words. As someone who chose to learn Yiddish so as to be able to participate in a wide variety of Yiddish discourse communities, religious and secular, academic and familial, and to have access to a vast body of literature, I have trouble recognizing a Yiddish that colors everything Jewish no matter what is being expressed. My resistance to the term *Jewish* and an analysis of this resistance makes manifest how one generation’s normalized view of a language can communicate differently to those of another generation.

Yiddish as a Foreigner’s Language

Throughout our conversations, many of the participants’ grammatical, phonological, and lexical patterns construct a Yiddish that is the language of foreigners, as opposed to that of American immigrants or that of American Jews. For example, in turn 34 Frances says:

- 34 F: ...I had this (1.3) FOreign stepmother who spoke JEWish to her children (.) she had two children .hh and uh (1.8) unlike her when I wa::s (1.5) my mother died (.) when I sixteen so I was a teenager. (1.5) So I was really AMERican.

The linguistic features in this turn contrast Frances’ identity as “AMERican” with her stepmother who was “FOreign” and spoke “JEWish.” The increased volume on “FOreign,” “JEWish,” and “AMERican” draws these words out as the content of comparison, constructing the act of speaking Yiddish as something that foreigners do. The subordinating conjunction “so” in the last sentence suggests that because Frances did not speak Yiddish regularly in her home until she was 16, she was more American than she would have been if she had grown up with her stepmother. Not speaking Yiddish plays a role in her claiming an American identity.

Frances continues to communicate a Yiddish that is un-American and foreign through her lexical choices and sentence stress in turn 6; here she responds to my question of whether she spoke Yiddish at school saying, “So I grew up (.9) I was born on the Lower East Side. And that was all JEWish. But when I went to school (1.5) it was American.” Here Frances uses the subordinating conjunction “but” to contrast or complicate the first clause, in which she explains that the neighborhood of her youth was Jewish, implying both that Jews lived there and that Yiddish was spoken there. Frances pauses before saying “it was American” and puts added stress on “American,” which functions to highlight the opposition within the sentence between “JEWish” and “American.” It is also notable that Frances does not choose to say that she spoke

English in school. Rather, she says “American,” a lexical choice that names a national and cultural identity and implies that speaking English is part of that identity.

Frances again constructs Yiddish as the language of foreigners in turn 40 where she explains that she spoke Yiddish with her mother’s relatives, “Cause they too came over” from Eastern Europe like her stepmother. The stress on “too” highlights that those with whom one speaks Yiddish are similarly foreign, belonging to one non-American group. The foreignness of Yiddish speakers is also expressed by Frances’ lexical choice in turn 50, “Yeah. (.) So I heard it [Yiddish] when she [F’s mother] spoke to her uh (2.1) landsman? (1.1) You know the word lands-landsman landsfrau um yeah.” Rather than stating that her mother spoke Yiddish with others who came from similar areas of Europe, Frances uses the Yiddish and then the German word for *countrymen*. Choosing to label Yiddish speakers with a non-English word emphasizes their foreignness as speakers of Yiddish from an unnamable country.

Through her sentence stress and lexical choices, Fay also communicates a foreign Yiddish that is in contrast with what she posits as the American language, English. Fay discusses her parents’ native languages in turn 47 (see Appendix C): “My mother and father came from Russia. And they spoke ↑Yiddish.” Fay’s raised pitch and stress on “Yiddish” suggests that her parents’ speaking Yiddish is an obvious fact, given that they came from Russia. Soon after, in the same turn, Fay describes how her mother “loved” America, “And when she came here she only wanted to SPEAK American SPEAK English.” By using “American” as the name for the language, as Frances does, Fay also constructs English as the official language of America. She goes so far as to clarify what she means by “American,” restating it as “English.” Thus, like Frances’, Fay’s discourse communicates a Yiddish that is foreign to America by aligning it with foreign places and contrasting it with English, which is expressed as the true language of Americans.

Sarah similarly constructs a Yiddish that is un-American. However, her lexical choices and sentence stress specifically suggest a cultural dissonance between Yiddish and upper class or educated America. Describing the differences between her mother and father, Sarah states:

- 2 S: So my FAther was interested in (.8) in CULTure and AMERicanization ((inaudible)).
But my MOther was a very good Yiddish speaker...

Sarah raises her volume on the objects of comparison, thus highlighting them; “FAther,” “CULTure,” and “AMERicanization,” are stressed through volume, and then, after the subordinating conjunction, “MOther,” who speaks Yiddish, is stressed. This contrast constructs a Yiddish that is outside of what is American and what is recognized or valued as “culture” in America.

Sarah’s linguistic choices when discussing her husband’s lack of knowledge of Yiddish again depicts Yiddish as at odds with a version of American culture:

- 24 S: My husband didn’t know too much. He had Yiddish with a Ha:hva:hd accent.
25 J: HAHAHA.

The way in which Sarah says “Ha:hva:hd” alludes to the stereotype of Harvard students as refined, pretentious, and upper class. In turn 24, Sarah states both that her husband did not know

much Yiddish and that he did but spoke it with a “Ha:hva:hd” accent. This paradox suggests that to speak Yiddish with a “Ha:hva:hd” accent is not to know it at all. Thus, Sarah’s phonological choice and paradoxical phrasing constructs a Yiddish that is incompatible with the upper class culture associated with “Ha:hva:hd.” That my response to the idea of speaking Yiddish with this educated accent is laughter illustrates that I recognize and share a normalized view of Yiddish that is at odds with the cultural connotations of “Ha:hva:hd.” Sarah’s version of Yiddish resembles Frances’s and Fay’s in that Yiddish is constructed through language as foreign to an aspect of American culture.

A normalized view of Yiddish as a foreign and un-American language is an ideologically laden one that has the power to shape what roles one can imagine Yiddish playing in one’s life in America. Such a view of the language might nurture the belief that using and passing on Yiddish does not have a place in the lives of those who wish to fully participate in American culture and American life. Those who inherited or share a belief in a Yiddish that is the language of foreigners may come to see the language as marking them as foreign or as foreign to the cultural and class attributes they wish to project. A resistance to adopting a language normalized as being un-American might be especially strong for the first- and second-generation American Jews firmly committed to being American and living within American culture. Alternatively, those of my generation may see using the language as a way to claim an alternative identity within America, or to exhibit a distance from mainstream American culture. Thus, this view of the language could mean differently for different generations.

A Language of Humor

Through their laughter and lexical choices, the participants normalize a Yiddish that is a language of humor. In the following turns, Esther communicates this idea of Yiddish as humorous (see Appendix B):

- 30 J: ...What do you think is special about the language?
31 E: (1.6) Has some beautiful wonderful expressions that English does not give you.
32 J: Yeah.
33 E: Uh I can’t think of them off-hand but my husband would would often ha often say things to me and we would laugh. I had ha ((inaudible))...

What begins as a description of what is “beautiful” in Yiddish, shifts to a depiction of a language with expressions that can cause laughter in the present recollection of them and caused laughter in the past. Thus, contextually, Yiddish’s beauty is intrinsically linked with its humor. Fay also laughs when describing Yiddish’s character; when asked to elaborate on why it is a shame that the language is fading away, she responds, “It’s a LANGUAGE LOST. And it’s a- it’s a beautiful lang- there are certain things you say in Yiddish (.7) that somehow or other haha translated ha in English it doesn’t sound ha the same” (turn 45). Fay and Esther’s laughter when describing what is special about Yiddish communicates that Yiddish itself is humorous. Similarly, when I press Alma to provide an example that illustrates the “joy” she claims gives the language value she responds (turn 54, Appendix A), “Well for instance well I’m trying to think of something right now (.) uh (.) I’d have to take Jackie Mason or someone like that to say that

word you know” (turn 56). Jackie Mason is a Jewish comedian; by using his speech as a model of where one might find examples of what is essential to Yiddish, Alma reinforces the normalized idea of a Yiddish that is, by nature, funny. Thus, through different means, several of the participants communicate a Yiddish that has a specific personality; what is essential to the language is its humor. As noted, it is difficult to assert that languages are naturally endowed with a character independent of the cultural representation of this character. Rather, the idea of Yiddish as funny is socially constructed and ideologically charged.

What is most “beautiful” about Yiddish and characteristic of it, its humor, is depicted as accessible and available to non-Yiddish speakers. In turn 30, Sarah states, “And um NOW Yiddish is a language of humor. People who aren’t JEWISH use it!” Sarah’s choice of the word “use” over “speak” implies that the mere adoption of Yiddish words into English speech can endow the speech with humor, signaling or cuing that something is funny. Frances also suggests that what is specific to Yiddish lives in English. When I ask Frances what one can say in Yiddish that is impossible to say in English, she responds, “Chutzpah,” (turn 164) using a Yiddish word that commonly appears in urban English speech and English dictionaries. Frances goes on to say that there are many such examples, and that she gets “a kick outta hearing non-Jewish people using Jewish expressions” (turn 166). Here again, the verb choice of “use” rather than “speak” or “say” reinforces the idea that what is special about Yiddish, its “expressions,” which are regularly described as humorous, is available to be employed by those who do not speak the language. Alma’s comment that she would have to turn to Jackie Mason for examples of unique Yiddish words also naturalizes the view that true Yiddish can live within English. Jackie Mason performs in an English sprinkled with Yiddish expressions “used” to make the audience to laugh. (In fact, his book *How to Talk Jewish* [1990] is a guide to 100 Yiddish words commonly used in English.)

All languages can express humor, and Yiddish is equally capable of expressing sorrow or intellectual curiosity as English. By normalizing a Yiddish that is especially adept at expressing humor, the participants may merely be communicating what they value in the language. However, the same normalized view of Yiddish may suggest a limited role for its use. To see Yiddish as intrinsically funny may be to ghettoize the language, aligning it with a certain mode of communication, as opposed to recognizing it as an apt vehicle for every aspect of human experience. An analysis of how the humorous quality of the language is communicated in context, specifically in terms of how this characterization is established in relation to English, sheds light on the larger implications of a normalized view of a funny Yiddish. By putting forth a Yiddish that can be used in English to express humor, one suggests that Yiddish words themselves cue that something is to be taken as a joke or in a humorous light. To see Yiddish as a language that signals that something is humorous is quite different than viewing it as language adept at expressing humor. The former view suggests that whenever one speaks or uses Yiddish, humor is mapped on the content, hence limiting the potential of the language to express such things as sadness or numbness. This version of Yiddish also suggests that Yiddish need not be learned in order to be used. If Yiddish is seen as a tool for making things funny in English, then one can use the language without fully knowing it in a way that would allow the language to be passed on. The idea of Yiddish as a spice added to English to achieve humor is intrinsically connected to the idea of Yiddish as foreign in that humor is often achieved by mixing things foreign and things native or natural.

The Context of Yiddish

As I have discussed, Fairclough (1999) asserts the importance of intertextuality and intertextual analysis. In this section, I address the intertextual qualities of Frances's speech by analyzing how the meaning of quoted texts is shaped and reshaped through context. During our talk, Frances replays and quotes scripts of past Yiddish conversations. To suggest that these quotes are indeed direct quotes, presented as they took place, would be to ignore that Frances is shaping them through her ideological stance. Her choice of quotes represents the genre of speaking Yiddish in the past as fraught with misunderstandings and loss of power. She is the only participant who regularly draws Yiddish into her recollections of the past. (Sarah, the other participant who speaks Yiddish in our conversation, does so as a teacher, instructing me and providing the definitions of words.) However, Frances's quotes depict scenes often alluded to by the other participants in which a child and parent are speaking different languages to each other. (In Alma's conversation, see turn 22; in Fay's, see turn 47).

All of the samples of Yiddish sentences in Frances' speech are quoted from foreign-born Yiddish speakers as they interact with first-generation American Jews. This occurs when Frances discusses the children she knew in her youth learning English in school:

- 12 F: Because it was a PROblem.
13 J: Yeah.
14 F: A conflict understanding- like a kid would go to school and
come home and talk English (.8) What are you s- vos
meynstu?
15 J: Yeah.
16 F: Right? What are you telling me?

In turn 14, Frances performs a self-correction and restates the words quoted from a paradigmatic immigrant parent in Yiddish, implying that Yiddish is integral to depicting the past accurately. The Yiddish in the quoted text communicates the Yiddish speaker's inability to understand an English-speaking child. Whereas the literal definition of *vos meynstu* is *what do you mean*, Frances translates the verb as "to tell." Whereas, *to mean* implies that the central act being performed through language is the attempt to share meaning with another and that this meaning is arrived at through an interpretive interaction, *to tell* carries a different implication. *To tell somebody something* suggests that you are sharing knowledge with him or her from a higher position. *To tell somebody something* in a language they do not understand is to highlight their lack of access to whatever information you might hold. Frances' translation of the Yiddish text depicts a Yiddish speaker in a position of linguistic powerlessness. Yiddish of the past is thus constructed through intertextuality as a language that endows its speakers with less communicative power than those who use English have.

Frances again "quotes" from past uses of Yiddish when describing her husband's attempts to speak with her stepmother in Yiddish:

- 20 F: ...So he would sta-start to talk to her in Jewish. (2.0)
BROken Jewish. And she would say MAxele his name was
Mac. Maxele .hhh retsn mir in English.
21 J: Hahhahhahhahhah

The phrase “retsn mir” means *speak to me* in Yiddish. As is evidenced by my laughter, there is humor in this representation of miscommunication. I found and find it ironic that Frances depicts her stepmother asking Mac to speak English in Yiddish. Mac’s Yiddish is so incomprehensible that the stepmother must ask him to speak English. Yet, she does not seem to know enough English to ask him to do so in that language. This scene suggests that these two will never be able to communicate. There is added irony in the fact that Frances’ stepmother is quoted as calling Mac “Maxele,” the affectionate Yiddish version of his name. (*Ele* is a diminutive ending that shows affection.) Frances’s stepmother is depicted as using Yiddish to express closeness at a moment when closeness is impossible. Frances makes a point of saying “his name was Mac,” confirming that his true identity was not in that Yiddish name. Again, Frances’s linguistic choices depict Yiddish as the site of communication breakdowns between generations.

That I participate in this story of miscommunication by laughing illustrates the way in which Yiddish’s role can become normalized through speech. I recognize this story as funny and in doing so support Frances’s version of Yiddish with my laughter. Yet, as someone who hopes that Yiddish will continue to be a living language in America, I believe that the version of Yiddish constructed through Frances’s use of intertextuality is a dangerous one. The texts she chooses and the language through which she frames and translates these texts work to socially construct a Yiddish that endows its speakers with little communicative power and causes distance between generations.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have illustrated that nondominant discourse can be analyzed in terms of how it ideologically constructs aspects of society. My analysis of the participants’ discourse suggests that many first-generation American Yiddish speakers communicate a normalized view of Yiddish as a vehicle for expressing one’s Jewishness; as a foreign, un-American language; as a language of humor that can be used by English speakers; and as the site and cause of intergenerational difference and loss of power.

My findings demonstrate that a CDA approach to non-majority discourse can produce insights into how social realities are constructed through language. The linguistic patterns and choices within the participants’ discourse illustrate that their speech communicates ideological stances. Although the subjects’ speech is not the “dominant discourse” of their time, these stances have had the power to shape how Yiddish is seen in the secular Jewish community. Thus, my findings suggest that future CDA studies can benefit from analyzing minority discourse, and that ignoring such discourse is methodologically flawed.

If we are to look at the participants’ Yiddish as the meaning of Yiddish that has been passed down to the next generation, we might better understand the position the language is in today. As I have illustrated, many of the participants communicate a Yiddish that expresses Jewishness, is an un-American language of foreigners, is humorous, and historically carries implications of communicative powerlessness. There are several reasons why the participants’ views of Yiddish might not help sustain language’s life in modern America. I have discussed my own negative response to the idea of Yiddish as a vehicle for Jewishness, and I believe that my reaction stems out of a contemporary understanding of the relationship between ethnicity, identity, and language shared by many of those of the generations following the participants’.

My reaction suggests why those who inherited an idea of Yiddish as vehicle for Jewishness might not actively attempt to learn and keep a language inseparable from a concept of Jewishness foreign to contemporary ways of thinking. One can also imagine why parents who see Yiddish as un-American might not choose to teach their children or even stress the importance of this language associated with difference, especially when the difference has been previously enacted in the relationships between parents and children. This choice might be especially salient for secular Jewish parents for whom retaining Jewishness is not a central concern. A normalized view of Yiddish as a language of humor accessible to non-Yiddish speakers may obscure the richness of the language while also suggesting that actively learning the language is unnecessary: what is most characteristic about Yiddish is available in English.

The Yiddish put forth by the participants is in contrast with the idea of Yiddish presented by many proponents of Yiddish revitalization who stress that Yiddish is an American literary language with a rich cultural history in this country. Several immigrant languages in America, such as Spanish, have come to be seen as American languages integral to the cultural diversity of American life. Yiddish revitalizationists understand that whether or not an immigrant language is considered foreign or American affects the continuation of that language, especially in terms of education policy, and are often careful to state the American quality of Yiddish. The view of Yiddish as a literary language tied to the culture and history of Jews in America is quite different than the view of Yiddish as a language that signals humor and that is available to English speakers. Yiddishists express their understanding of Yiddish as a complex language that must be studied and learned in order to stay alive, often without addressing the idea of the language as filled with words like *kvetch*, *schlep*, *schmuck*, and so on.

Recognizing that contrasting ideas of the social and cultural meaning of Yiddish are expressed by different discourse communities is much like recognizing that the two groups speak different languages. Although it is clear why Yiddish revivalists might avoid perpetuating the participants' idea of Yiddish, to recognize its prevalence could help revivalists better communicate with and involve all Yiddish speakers. This study is significant in that it provides an account of how an influential view of Yiddish is expressed. I hope that this account can lead to the production of future discourse on Yiddish that will engage those who see Yiddish as the participants in this study do.

Limitations of the Study

As stated, this study analyzes the discourse of six Yiddish speakers, which limits my ability to make widespread assertions regarding first-generation American Yiddish speakers' discourse. In the future, I hope to support my observations by collecting data from more participants and presenting my analysis of this data. In addition, all of the participants are female. This was not an intentional choice, but reflects the ratio of women to men in the Home. Further studies might investigate whether the normalized Yiddish I discuss is gendered by comparing my findings with an analysis of male discourse on Yiddish. In the conclusion of this study, I draw on observations I have made about how Yiddish revivalists discuss Yiddish. An in-depth study must be done to further demonstrate the validity of these observations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Leslie Beebe and Dr. Howard Williams for their invaluable guidance. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Managing Editor and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. I am very grateful for the participation of residents of the Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale whose insights extended far beyond the topic at hand and to Susan Putterman for her support of the project.

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APPENDIX A

Transcript of Conversation between Alma and Jennifer

(A=Alma, J=Jennifer)

- 1 J: So::- are you:- did you- when did you learn Yiddish?
2 A: Uh from my mother and father wh- after I was born.
3 J: After you were born.=
4 A: Um[hm]
5 J: [Did] you speak it in your home?=
6 A: =Yes we did.
7 J: And what did you ta- what did you- where did you grow up?
8 A: I grew up in Brownsville that's where we were living at the time.
9 J: Where's Brownsville?
10 A: Brownsville is um (2.9) hhh how can I say it? Near Pitkin Avenue and Browns

- and and it was a very good area for Jewish people.
- 11 J: And did most of the people you grew up with speak Yiddish?
- 12 A: Well practically all of them. ((coughs)) °excuse me.°
- 13 J: Did you learn English at the same time?
- 14 A: At the same time as that I was there? Yes because I was the youngest of seven children=
- 15 J: =Wow=
- 16 A: =and my mother and father spoke Yiddish and the children were learning Yiddish. The oldest ones were going to Hebrew school. And I was the youngest so therefore there was a lot of Yiddish spoken in the home.
- 17 J: Did you enjoy speaking in it? What [did you talk]
- 18 A: [I don't think] I even recognized that it was Yiddish and it was different from the language that I would hear later on in school. (.7) It was part of living bringing up and uh and it just uh happened as uh uh something that should happen in any one of the Jewish homes.
- 19 J: And what happened when you went to school?
- 20 A: When I went to school there I learned that there was another language and that uh (.) the language was totally different from what we spoke at home but I learned it because the teachers were teaching us that.
- 21 J: Did you like learning it?
- 22 A: Oh ↑yes I really did because it was- I could go home and speak that way when my mother and father said anything I would answer in in English and they wouldn't understand what ↑I was [saying.]
- 23 J: [hehehe] Did they get upset or=
- 24 A: =No no no they were very hAppy that I was learning another language.
- 25 J: A:nd di:d-did you have any kids?
- 26 A: You mean after I married [I hope] hahahahaha[hahahaha]=
- 27 J: [yeah] [hahahaha]=
- 28 A: =[Not before hahha.hhhhahahah]
- 29 J: =[hahaha.hhha no of course not.]
- 30 A: Yes hha we have three children.
- 31 J: Oh wow. What were their names?
- 32 A: Uh Alan Charles and Suzanne.
- 33 J: And did they sp- do they speak Yiddish?
- 34 A: No. Unfortunately:::: I will say that Alan went to Hebrew school.
...
- 35 J: Do you think that Yiddish will still be a language in a hundred years? People still speak it?
- 36 A: Yes because the- the- the people that are anxious to continue it will still continue it. They don't want it as a lost la-language.
- 37 J: Do you think it's important? [Or do you]
- 38 A: [Absolutely] important. I even like it when they speak even though- see Yiddish I can- I can understand (1.2) uh (1.2) the tense Hebrew I can not understand.
- 39 J: Yeah. I'm the same way. [I] can't understand a word [of ha Hebrew.]
- 40 A: [See] [Well because] Hebrew is

- much harder to understand than Yiddish=
41 J: =Yeah=
42 A: =Yiddish we have so many words that are so close to me because they were the (.)
children children that heard it so many times in the house. Much more than
Hebrew=
43 J: =Yeah=
44 A: =Hebrew was in Hebrew school.
45 J: Yeah.
46 A: They had to do a lesson and then they forgot it.
47 J: Yeah.
48 A: This- but ↑Jewish (.) that was jokes and over done in the home.
49 J: Yeah. And do you think people will continue to speak it.
50 A: .Hh I believe so.
51 J: Yeah.
52 A: I don't think it'll be a lost language. I hope not anyway.
53 J: What do you think would be lost if we lost Yiddish?
54 A: I think the joy (.) of certain certain uh things that are spoken certain (.5) words
that you cannot uh integrate into the English language.
55 J: Do you have any examples?
56 A: Well for instance well I'm trying to think of something right now (.) uh (.) I'd have
to take Jackie Mason or someone like [that to say] that word you know.=
57 J: [heheheohe]
58 A: =Actually I can not think of it at the moment but there are certain words that you
cannot translate into English.
59 J: It's true.
...

APPENDIX B

Transcript of Conversation between Esther and Jennifer

(E=Esther, J=Jennifer)

- ...
- 1 J: So your parents spoke Yiddish?
2 E: ↑Yes. Echem.
3 J: >And they spoke it in the home.< Where were they from?
4 E: Originally they were from (.9) well I don't know what you would call it. One day
it was Russia one day is was Romania. They were on that border. In [that] area.
5 J: [And]
6 J: Where did you- where did they live in the states. In New York?
7 E: Yes.
8 J: Yeah. °Yeah.° And did they live in a Yiddish speaking community?
9 E: OH yes.
10 J: Yeah=

- 11 E: =Oh yes. I was brought up in a Yiddish speaking community. Definitely.
12 J: And your husband spoke Yiddish too.
13 E: Oh my husband came from a very (.9) a very Orthodox background. My family (.) they were Orthodox but not any any- he wasn't extreme.
...
14 J: And so he (E's husband) spoke Hebrew and Yiddish.
15 E: Oh ye::s. He spoke several languages fluently.
16 J: Yeah.
17 E: Oh yeah.
18 J: Did you guys have kids? You guys >have a lot of kids right?<
19 E: What dear?
20 J: You have ki- children.
21 E: Oh sure.
22 J: Yeah.
23 E: Sure I do.
24 J: Did they grow up speaking:: what languages did they grow up speaking?
25 E: Well my children spo- well we lived in France for a while=
26 J: =Oh wow.
27 E: And they spoke French very well. And they still do actually. They're both they're bilingual. And they ah the children you know their children as well my grandchildren also have taken over the language as well. But they all speak English.
...
28 J: Do you think Yiddish will still be spoken in a hundred years from now?
29 E: Oh I hope so.
30 J: Yeah. What do you think is special about the language?
31 E: (1.6) Has some beautiful wonderful expressions that English does not give you.
32 J: Yeah.
33 E: Uh I can't think of them off-hand but my husband would would often ha often say things to me and we would laugh. I had ha ((inaudible)). He had these expressions these manners of speaking. He was: quite a man.
34 J: Do you think tha::t there's a way to make sure the language continues?
35 E: Oh ye::s. I think if if uh more young people uh devoted their time to studying Yiddish (.) and Hebrew both it would be a wonderful thing.
36 J: Yeah.
37 E: Uh my grandsons all had um (.5) well especially the youngest one he took over at his bar mitzvah [he was so] very well learned in that way.
38 J: [hehehheh]
39 E: He speaks Hebrew. And he understands it. No Yiddish though of course unfortunately. The family doesn't speak it well and they- they never made an attempt I guess. But uh (.) uh the others (.5) the other grandsons did very well with their Bar mitzvah and as far as continuing I think they they just don't want that much.
...

APPENDIX C

Transcript of Conversation between Fay and Jennifer

(Fa=Fay, J=Jennifer)

- 1 Fa: Who's this for? Is this for your classes?
2 J: Yeah. I'm in graduate school at Teachers College.
3 Fa: Oh how nice.
4 J: Yeah. So [I uh]
5 Fa: [Which] which one?
6 J: Columbia.
7 Fa: Oh good.
8 J: Yeah.
9 Fa: That's not bad heh.
10 J: Yeah. Did heh did you grow up in New York?
11 Fa: Yeah.
12 J: Yeah.
13 Fa: Brooklyn though=
14 J: =in Brooklyn. Where in Brooklyn?
15 Fa: In uh Boro Park. You know it at all?
16 J: I used to live in Brooklyn. But in Park Slope.
17 Fa: Oh.
18 J: Yeah. A little closer in.
19 Fa: A little different=
20 J: =Yeah. So did you grow up speaking Yiddish?
21 Fa: NO I spoke English but my family my parents spoke Yiddish.
22 J: [And]
23 Fa: [What] else go ahead=
24 J: = Did they teach it to [you] or did [you]
25 Fa: [No] [you] just you live with it you pick it up.
They didn't have to teach it to me. This is the way they spoke to someone just like English.
26 J: Did your siblings- did you have siblings?
27 Fa: Yes I had a sister.
28 J: Did you two speak in Yiddish? Or did [you]
29 Fa: [no] we spoke in English.
30 J: And=
31 Fa: =Yeah. Go ahead.
32 J: Hehhe if you want to elaborate on anything you're [obviously more than]
33 Fa: [You first talk to me] and I'll
get an idea what you're doing.
34 J: No I'm just curious about when people spoke it or how people [spoke it.]
35 Fa: [Okay. Just] ask
anything.

- 36 J: Okay. Did you- did your kids- do you have children?
37 Fa: Yes.
38 J: How many?
39 Fa: I have one daughter.
40 J: Did she learn any or=
41 Fa: =Not too well 'cause I didn't talk it at home. And uh so she picked up a little bit here and there and she can you know if I say something (.) she catches on. But she doesn't speak it all. It's a shame because it's a language that's just fading away. The next generation. And that's really a shame.
42 J: Why do you- what do you think we'll lose if we lose Yiddish?=
43 Fa: =Pardon me?
44 J: What do you think we'll lo- what wou- what would be a shame about it?
45 Fa: It's a LANGUAGE LOST. And it's a- it's a beautiful lang- there are certain things you say in Yiddish (.7) that somehow or other haha translated ha in English it doesn't sound ha the same. And uh I think it's a beautiful language. And I think it's a shame the next generation won't ha- but we'll see. There are a lot religious children that do speak it. And speak it well. They come here! (.6) A lot of them. And they talk it.
46 J: Why- why do you think a lot of people didn't=
47 Fa: =Because they go to- they go to a Hebrew school. They go to a um (1.3) a Yeshiva where that's what they're talking that's what they're ↑learning. I went to an Am- a regular elementary public school so I didn't get any Yiddish in my education. So whatever I picked up I picked up from my family. My mother and father came from Russia. And they spoke ↑Yiddish. They spoke Russian and Yiddish. And um my mother was- she loved this country. And when she came here she only wanted to SPEAK American SPEAK English. WRITE and read in English. So haha she would say to me () you know what? I'll talk to you in Yiddish but you talk to me in English. And that's what we did. I only spoke English to my parents. But they spoke Yiddish to me.
48 J: Did your husband grow up speaking it or::?
49 Fa: No my husband's same as I=
50 J: =Yeah=
51 Fa: =Parents spoke Yiddish. They come from Russia too. But they spoke Yiddish. And w- and we spoke English. It was very funny because when I met the parents when I used to talk English to them I felt that they weren't understanding me. So heh I would talk in YIDDISH to them. And that taught me a lot too. Sort of actually speaking it. So it was nice. What else would you like to know?
...

APPENDIX D

Transcript of Conversation between Frances and Jennifer

(F=Frances, J=Jennifer)

- ...
- 1 J: So when you were growing up you spoke Yiddish in your house?
- 2 F: To my stepmother .hhh a:::nd .hhh relations.
- 3 J: You di- you didn't speak it at schoo::l or when you were playing with your friends?
- 4 F: Now I always lived .hhh in uh (1.3) New York is noted (.7) I grew up in New York City and it's:: a combination of everybody that comes from Europe... And when they came- when the Jewish people came over they were looking for (.6) bi::g neighborhoods becaus::e they needed someone to speak the same (.3) LANguage. For each to learn from each other. You know what I'm saying?
- 5 J: Yeah.
- 6 F: So I grew up (.9) I was born on the Lower East Side. And that was all JEWish. But when I went to school (1.5) it was American.
- 7 J: Yeah.
- 8 F: Let me think that far back. WA:::Y far back.
- 9 J: Hehheh
- 10 F: Um (6.9) The children I played with (1.5) A::lso were learning the language English >or whatever.< Most of them spoke at home with the parents with the parents' language.
- 11 J: Yeah.
- 12 F: Because it was a PROblem.
- 13 J: Yeah.
- 14 F: A conflict understanding- like a kid would go to school and come home and talk English (.8) What are you s- vos meynstu?
- 15 J: Yeah.
- 16 F: Right? What are you telling me?
- 17 J: Yeah.
- 18 F: In fact the man I married HA (2.9) he spoke NO Jewish at a::ll.
- 19 J: Really?
- 20 F: ABSolutely none. And he was STARting to learn cause my stepmother- he wanted to make a good impression. So he would sta-start to talk to her in Jewish. (2.0) BROken Jewish. And she would say MAxele his name was Mac. Maxele .hhh retsn mir in English.
- 21 J: Hahhahhahhahhah
- 22 F: You know what I'm saying?
- 23 J: Yeah.
- 24 F: It was like breaking teeth.
- 25 J: Yeah. How did he try and learn it? (.8) Would you teach it to him?
- 26 F: Me?
- 27 J: Yeah.
- 28 F: He struggled. Actually he came from a large family. Seven children.
- 29 J: Wow.
- 30 F: He was the baby. By the time he showed up (2.1) the older ones were either working in school- °not in school.° Although the oldest was MARRied.
- 31 J: WOW.
- 32 F: Eighteen years between my husband and the eldest (.) so they treated him .hhh as

- a baby. So he learned his ENglish from his six- his six siblings. (2.5) And by the time he got to his mother she understood a lot of ↑English ‘cause the others broke her ↑in.
- 33 J: Yeah.
- 34 F: See. When it came- when I started GOing with him cause I had this (1.3) FOReign stepmother who spoke JEWish to her children (.) she had two children .hh and uh (1.8) unlike her when I wa::s (1.5) my mother died (.) when I sixteen so I was a teenager. (1.5) So I was really AMERican.
- 35 J: Do did you speak Yiddish before your s- you met your stepmother?
- 36 F: Somewhat.
- 37 J: Yeah.
- 38 F: °Somewhat° with m- my mother’s relations.
- 39 J: Yeah.
- 40 F: Cause they too came over.
- 41 J: Yeah.
- 42 F: With her.
- 43 J: From where?
- 44 F: Uhm. (1.2) Well that’s another story. Where she came from was either ↑Russia or ↓Poland.
- 45 J: Yeah.
- 46 F: Because it kept- depends on what time=
- 47 J: =yeah.
- 48 F: Yeah. So it was Russia Russia-Poland °or whatever it was.° One week it was- she came from ↑Poland the next week she was from ↓Russia. The same city.
- 49 J: Yeah.
- 50 F: Yeah. (.) So what I heard when she spoke to her uh (2.1) landsman? (1.1) You know the word lands-landsman landsfrau um yeah. I don’t know German came into that. Not that she was German. But that was a mixture because uh (2.7) they sai::d that Yiddish was bastardized German. [During]
- 51 J: [Do you] think that it’s true?
- 52 F: Yeah.
- 53 J: Yeah.
- 54 F: And the German people thought they were higher-ups. Pppff I’m with you.
- 55 J: Heh yeah.
- 56 F: Anyway I had some German friends later on. You could always tell them. They had an ATTitude.
- 57 J: Yeah.
- 58 F: My closest friend at work um (1.1) she did not have the attitude. But when she met another one who had a German background?
- 59 J: Yeah.
- 60 F: I was a lost soul.
- 61 J: It’s true.
- 62 F: >NO I know that.<
- 63 J: Yeah.
- 64 F: I observed that. Couldn’t help it. I didn’t l- I didn’t choose those friends. If I

- knew they were German I would ((makes a dismissive hand motion)) especially when the war came along.
- 65 J: Yeah. Were they German Jews? Or no?
- 66 F: Yes they were German [Jews.] My CLOsest friend (.8) was a German Jew who=
- 67 J: [Yeah]
- 68 F: =was brought up more AmERican. She didn't go the cheyder °neither did I° (.)
but
- she did go to um (2.1) Reformed Synagogue.
- 69 J: Uhhuh.
- 70 F: And has the Bas M- had her Bas Mitzvah and all of that. Uh she went to (.8) it wasn't Bas Mitzvah. (.8) What do they call it? They call it u:h (.9) She was confirmed.
- 71 J: Yeah.
- 72 F: Right. (1.3) Yeah. I miss her. She died a while back. One I'm still close with (.) but if you talk Jewish to her (1.6) ((whispering at the same volume)) she doesn't understand a word.
- 73 J: Really?
- 74 F: Her parents were more Americanized in the beginning. So if we went to anything that- Jewish around? or if we had any affair to go to a money raiser some of these organizations and it had JEWish entertainers we'd HOWL with laughter and she'd say (1.1) what was that. Vera (.8) you've heard enough to understand some English- some Jewish. Well I don't know it! She was- pushed it aside I think.
- 75 J: Yeah.
- 76 F: To stay (1.1) ↓higher up.
- 77 J: Yeah.
- 78 F: Didn't make her a bad person?
- 79 J: No.
- 80 F: It didn't maker her ANYthing. Anyway I was close with her .hhh be::cau::se my first trip to Europe she was along. We became friendly and we went traveling together. She never married. By the time I went traveling (.2) my daughter was pregnant with her first. A::nd that's my daughter?
- 81 J: Oh? Oh! [She's] so [pretty!]
- 82 F: [U::m] [uh?] Yeah. She's a great kid. That's my daughter. A::nd (3.5) isn't that- can you see the picture next to her? Isn't that?
- 83 J: A wedding picture?
- 84 F: Yeah.
- 85 J: Yeah.
- 86 F: Her ↑son and ↓daughter-in-law.
- 87 J: Oh::wow.
- 88 F: Yeah. So.
- 89 J: Do any of them speak Yiddish? (1.9) Do you think?
- 90 F: She had a difficulty (.) my daughter.
- 91 J: Yeah.
- 92 F: Because my HUsband I wasn't going to break my teeth with few words I knew. But we did speak JEWish um if didn't want the kids (1.3)
- 93 J: Uhhuh=

- 94 F: =You know (.) Uhm (.6) if it was a not a ↑secret but ((inaudible)). That's how I learned. Listening to my mother and father. You know. Uhm. ((To the housekeeper.)) Do you want us out of the room?
...
- 95 F: I married a baby.
96 J: Yehah.
97 F: Really.
98 J: Yeah. Heh.
99 F: If he wanted the MOON [he'd find a] ladder long enough to get it. [Really!]
100 J: [heheheheh] [Did y-] Did you have a religious house or no? In your house.
101 F: ((Nods her head no.)) Thank goodness.
102 J: Hehehe
103 F: I was not raised religious:. My mother had a candy store. (1.3) And ((inaudible)) her business. She had to go to work. I had a step-father. He worked. She was behind the counter. When he came home he helped out. So (1.2) there was no time.
104 J: Yeah.
105 F: For that.
106 J: Did they speak Yiddish to each other?
107 F: They spoke POLish.
108 J: Uhhuh.
109 F: So I got used to hearing a coupla Polish words.
110 J: Yeah.
111 F: Um. (2.5) When my- my mother died when I was sixteen. ((inaudible)) Um. (1.8) And I've been on my ↑town °more or less.° But um (1.6) it either makes you or breaks you.
112 J: Yeah.
113 F: It made me. It made me strong. I could put up with a overgrown BABY.
114 J: Heheheheh.
115 F: But uh (.) it was a good marriage and uh (1.7) as I say we didn't speak Jewish. The coupla words I would throw in in Jewish (2.8) hhh my son couldn'tve cared less. He was the oldest.
...
- 116 J: Do you think people will speak Yiddish in a hundred years?
117 F: °No.°
118 J: No. How come?
119 F: It's a LOst language. (1.7)
120 J: Why do you think that happened?
121 F: First of all integration. My granddaughter married an Italian boy. (3.6) And you accept it.
122 J: Yeah.
123 F: And uh (1.3) he's got two beautiful children. She wears a star. She observes both holidays and so does he. My Italian ah: ((points to a photograph))
124 J: That one? In the grassy::
125 F: Yeah.

- 126 J: Yeah.
127 F: Yeah.
128 J: With the two=
129 F: =little girl and little boy.
130 J: Yeah.
131 F: Right. Right. And uh (2.7) the grandchildren- great-grandchildren don't speak Jewish at all. They do sing Jewish songs because Sharon my granddaughter wants them to have both.
132 J: Yeah.
133 F: She wasn't raised emm religious because I wasn't. But my daughter's husband was raised religious when they first got married .hhh he wanted my daughter to uh light the Sabbath candles. Which she did. Um. (1.7) I rather liked it. And the Bar \uparrow Mitzvahs. My grandson had a Bar Mitzvah in the house. The \uparrow temple the reception was at home. And uh Sharon the granddaughter had a Bas Mitzvah. Then my daughter uh divorced my uh grandson. He was playing around. He was playing around when she was pregnant with the daughter.
134 J: Wow=
135 F: =He was a bastard.
136 J: Yeah.
137 (2.4)
138 F: So then my granddaughter married an \uparrow Italian. Could you blame her?
139 J: No.
140 (2.7)
141 F: And to me a person is a person. You could be- some of these quote religious Jewish people (2.3) forget it.
142 J: Yeah.
143 F: They don't practice the religion deep down.
144 J: Yeah.
145 (3.3)
146 F: Forget it!
147 J: Yeah. Do you think anything will be lost if we lose Yiddish? Or do you think that's the way things go:: and=
148 F: =I'm sorry to say yeah. It'll be lost.
149 J: Yeah.
150 F: Unless it becomes a language in school.
151 J: Yeah.
152 F: Like a lost- like \downarrow Greek
153 J: [Yeah.]
154 F: [Oh G]od. But uh yeah. And my granddaughter's raising them as uh ((phone rings)) My God.
155 J: Do you want me to pass it to you?
...
156 F: Where were we?
157 J: We we::re talking about if Yiddish was gonna die out. You thought it was.
158 F: Yeah. I really do. Be::cause as I said before (.6) intermarriage mainly and this

- generation either aren't religious or of any sort or they can't make their minds up what they want to ↑be. They become ↑Unitarian. Or whatever else. If they really want a ↑religion. To some people it gives them (1.2) what- hope? Something to ↑believe in. I don't know.
- 159 J: Do you- what do you think? Do you think there are some things you can say in Yiddish that you [can't say in] English?
- 160 F: [((coughing))] Excuse me. [What?]
- 161 J: [Do you] think there are things you can say in Yiddish that you can't say in English?=
162 F: =Oh sure.
163 J: Like what?
164 F: Chutzpah?
165 J: Yeah.
166 F: U::m. (2.1) Oh there are so many. (3.1) They hit the nail on the head. One word and it could be a whole sentence. There's a whole lot of uh ((inaudible)). And I get a kick outta hearing non-Jewish people using Jewish expressions.
167 J: Yeah.
168 F: You know. And sometimes I just stop and think. (2.2) What word would that be? It's oh yeah. That'll stay. Because that becAME part of the English LANguage.
...

APPENDIX E

Transcript of Conversation between Sarah and Jennifer

(S=Sarah, J=Jennifer)

- ...
- 1 J: Do did you grow up speaking Yiddish? In your house when you were young?
- 2 S: It was am↑azing. My father was an intellectual who didn't ↑want- he wanted to AMERicanize and he went to college >and most folks didn't do that then.< So my FAther was interested in (.8) in CUlture and AMERicanization ((inaudible)). But my MOther was a very good Yiddish speaker and when we were little children she spoke to us in Yiddish and my uncle was a rabbi and a teacher of Yiddish. I was the only one interested. My brothers (.) no. And I learned at seven years of age to >speak read and write< Yiddish. And when I found out that the Forward (.) the-the- magazine (.7) th-the pAper (.6) the Jewish newspaper the Forward.
- 3 J: Yeah the Forvertz [hehe]
- 4 S: [yeah] the Forvertz at the Forvertz they pay two dollars for a vitz (.) a vitz is a joke (.) and I got two dollars.
- 5 J: Oh really! When you [were seven?]
- 6 S: [When I was] seven. Yeah.
- 7 J: What was the joke?
- 8 S: ((whispering)) I don't remember.

- 9 J: Ah. Oh no ha=
10 S: =I don't rehahacall.
11 J: I'll try to find it.
12 S: I wonder how you could- but th-th-they weren't uh analyzed then in those days. You know when it was? I'm ninety-five (.7) it was when I was um (1.1) I was born in 1909 November (1.2) and seven years later I published that joke. They wouldn't have any papers from that [time]
13 J: [yeah] you're right.=
14 S: But I got the two dollars and that meant a great deal to me.
15 J: So did you only speak Yiddish with your mother not with your father?=
16 S: =No. My father yes because he brought things home to read. He was so inspired that I was reading it and the boys were not.
...
17 J: So why do you think your brothers weren't interested [in learning?]
18 S: [Yeah that's] so interesting to me. I::: was interested in the folklore. And my uncle Hessl the uh Yiddishist would tell me wonderful stories. Anyway I was the creative writer in the family. I was the one- I published a story about my mother in women's day magazine. I mean I wasn't a great writer bu-bu-but I was interested in that sort of thing. And I can't imagine why they didn't but they didn't. Not a word. Not three words.
19 J: Did you speak Yiddish with people in your neighborhood?
20 S: Not part[↑]icularly. It was just my mother Uncle Hessl Aunt Rosie and I. We were we were sort of a family of Yiddishists. NOW then I dropped it in college. There was no Yiddish of any kind. And then when I got married and moved to Riverdale fifty- over (.7) fifty odd years. I became interested in the language and I joined YIVO. And I learned of a lot of organizations that were interested in Yiddish and that's how I got into it. THEN when I was in Riverdale I would give lectures on the language.
21 J: Di- do you have kids?
22 S: I have one kid and he doesn't know haha[ha he] doesn't he knows a little.
23 J: [hehehe]
24 S: And my husband didn't know too much. He had Yiddish with a Ha:hva:hd accent.
25 J: HAHAHA. Do you think that if? What would we lose if Yiddish ever died out?
26 S: I THINK what would be- we would the hu- we would lose the HEART of Ashkenazi Yiddish. We would lose the EUROPEAN Yiddish. We would perhaps go back to the Spanish (.) Hebrew ((inaudible)). We wouldn't have the HEART of Yiddish. The European heart that came from- cause the Germans are very nasty they say we stole their language (.) we improved it=
27 J: Hhahh
28 S: We improved it. That's my famous sentence. We improved [it.] We improved=
29 J: [Yeah]
30 S: =German. In that we gave it a heart. And um NOW Yiddish is is a language of humor. People who aren't JEWISH use it! For example. Here is a list. It's funny that you should come in at this moment when I some junk around. (1.1) But you see I've lost my vision completely. I see little.
...

- 31 S: Now WHERE in the world could you find another woman like this in this home?
32 J: Hhehehh. And do you think=
33 S: =And I'm blind and I'm getting so old=
34 J: =Why do you think people stopped speaking Yiddish? As much?
35 S: AH:: Yiddish was- the Jew was interested- fired up by education and the first thing he wanted to do. He knew what Yiddish meant in the old country. They killed them. They hit them. Yiddish wasn't good for them then. Then it really wasn't good for them! Because they were hurt by it. They were hurt by Yiddish! But. (1.1) So uh but what happened was the Jews were so starved for education that in the 1880's ((intercom announcement)) the literature started. And the ↑way the Jews in Europe has no way to express themselves. Th- they weren't printing newspapers in the little shtetlach. And the literature boomed. Their NEED for self-expression. And Sholom Aleichem and Mendle ((inaudible)) and um the Peretz later on. Simple people they were able to express themselves so beautifully in their little language it was incredible. In a few years you had (.5) Yiddish literature. And when they got to America (.) they beamed and they were constantly writing constantly expressing themselves and the papers and the poetry by the >men who worked in the sweatshop in the daytime.<
36 J: So what happened?! Why did people stop=
37 S: =Ahh. The need the need- J- Jewish ambition to be fired up by education. You're in America (.) you're going to be the best American there is and you're going to be the best speaker of English. And if Yiddish was identified with the shtetl with shlumperay with the vulgarity with the loneliness with all- you identified- the bad parts of Yiddish. And that's what happened. And- they threw it out. Threw it out the window.
38 J: Do you think Yiddish revival can work?
39 S: It can work- there's a little- Yiddish revival (.) for a few people.
40 J: Yeah.
41 S: For a few people. Fired up children of the past. And people like me there aren't many of us ↑left.
...

APPENDIX F

Transcript of Conversation between Tillie and Jennifer

(T=Tillie, J=Jennifer)

- ...
1 J: So did you grow up- where did you grow up?
2 T: I was born in Brooklyn. (1.3) And I remained in Brooklyn until I was almost eight when my mother passed away. And I was sent to my aunt in Pennsylvania and she raised me until I was sixteen. (.7)
3 J: Oh wow.
4 T: And when I was sixteen (.) my older sister she was almost nine years older than

- me (.) she got married and she wrote to me to pack up and come back and live with the family. And I lived with her till I got married.
- 5 J: Oh wow.
- 6 T: Yeah. So that's how. (1.0)
- 7 J: So did you grow up speaking Yiddish when you were in your mother's home?
- 8 T: No. My mother sp- well my mother spoke a good Jewish. But what I remember was we spoke English. And- but I always heard Jewish. My aunt (.7) spoke a lot of uh Jewish and that's really where I got it from. Then when I came back (.9) um my sisters and brothers we didn't speak it. We spoke English. But (.) after I was married for quite a while I took care of my father. Uh f- for fifteen years.
- 9 J: Wow.
- 10 T: And he only spoke Jewish. English he killed it. So my children UNderstand it. But they can't speak it. Because I never spoke Jewish to them. So uh- but they heard it you know. I was speaking to my father. But of course I lost a lot of it because from all the YEARS. He's gone since fifty-five. So I lost a lot of it. If you don't use it you forGET it.=
- 11 J: =Yeah=
- 12 T: =You know you forget some. But I still know a lot of it.
- 13 J: Do you ever miss speaki::ng Yiddish or=
- 14 T: =No.
- 15 J: No.
- 16 T: No because so many years going to school and everything there's English=
- 17 J: =Yeah.
- 18 T: So uh (1.1) that's- at home it was my father only spoke Jewish.
- 19 J: Do you think that in a hundred years the language will still be around?
- 20 T: Well I see a lot of uh (2.1) Orthodox you know? Th- they keep it? And some homes keep it. But most of the children don't use it.
- 21 J: How come? Why do you think?
- 22 T: Well it's uh (2.3) I guess going to school you know? And uh at home some of them. Even the Orthodox they talk in English.
- 23 J: Yeah.
- 24 T: So I don't know. I don't think that we'll ever- we'll ever lose it. There'll always be somebody t- but you never know=
- 25 J: =Yeah.
- 26 T: You never know what will be years from now.
- 27 J: That's true it's hard to predict. Do your kids live in New York now?
- 28 T: Uh yes! My son lives in Westchester=
- 29 J: =Oh wow.
- 30 T: And my daughter's out on the Island=
- 31 J: =So it's nice that they're close by.
- 32 T: That's where we lived out on the [is]
- 33 J: [Oh] really?
- 34 T: Yeah. So uh (1.3) we took only English.
- 35 J: Yeah hehe.
- 35 T: hhehe=
- 37 J: =Out on the island.

38 T: Yeah.
...

APPENDIX G

Transcription Conventions

Overlaps

[overlap begins
[

] overlap ends
]

= no interval between two speakers' utterances. Also links different parts of one speaker's continuous utterance when the speech goes onto another line due to an intervening line by a different speaker

Intervals

(0.0) timed pause

(.) untimed pause, less than .5 seconds

Delivery

- self-interruption, halting, or stammering

... a section or sentences has been left out of the transcript

: sound extension (the more, the longer the extension)

.hhh audible inhale (the more h's, the longer the inhale)

hhh audible exhale (the more h's, the longer the exhale)

. stopping fall in tone

? rising inflection

! animated tone

↑ marked rise in intonation on the word that follows

↓ marked fall in intonation on the word that follows

ABC increased volume

°abc° encloses speech at a decreased volume

underline emphasis

>abc< encloses speech at a faster rate

((abc)) encloses a noise or description